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SUBJECT: AMABASSADOR STRENGTHENS HISTORIC U.S. TIES TO BAGUIO CITY

11. Summary. During a February 28 to March 1 visit to Baguio City, the Ambassador emphasized the importance of the historical links between the region and the United States and showcased the continuing important partnership between the United States and the Philippines. She visited the Philippine Military Academy and met with the regional and Baguio police chiefs to strengthen relationships and underscore the vital role security services play in upholding human rights. She attended the Panagbenga festival with local and regional officials where she showed support for two USAID sponsored environmental groups performing in the parade. The Ambassador also visited with officials at a regional university with links to the United States where she also met a U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer teaching in the humanities department and coaching the regional champion elementary school soccer team. End summary.

BAGUIO: HISTORIC LINKAGES WITH THE UNITED STATES

12. Baguio City was established by Americans in 1900 at the site of an Ibaloi village known as Kafagway. It was designated by the Philippine Commission as the Summer Capital of the Philippines on June 1, 1903 and incorporated as a city by the Philippine Assembly on September 1, 1909. There is a presidential mansion, as well as Supreme Court and legislative offices in Baguio. Baguio is the seat of government of the Cordillera Administrative Region. The United States contributes to the prosperity of Baguio by assigning U.S. Peace Corps Volunteers in the areas of education, youth development and environmental education. Books and materials are provided to an American Shelf at the Baguio City Public Library, the Philippine Military Academy and an American Studies Resource Center (ASRC) at St. Louis University. USAID supports several local environmental and health initiatives. The United States also continues to assist American companies in the Baguio area.

VISIT TO MILITARY ACADEMY STRENGTHENS TIES

13. The Ambassador was greeted with full honors at the Philippine Military Academy where she had an office call with the Superintendent, Vice Admiral Leonardo C. Calderon, JR. Vice Admiral Calderon said that the academy was having trouble filling its recruitment quotas due in large part to competition from the merchant marines, which offers significant opportunities for Philippine seafarers. He mentioned a popular new reality show on Philippine television about two young Philippine Military Academy recruits as a possible answer to part of the problem by piquing interest in the Philippine Armed Forces. The Ambassador praised the cooperation between the Philippine Armed Forces and the Philippine National Police. Vice Admiral Calderon requested U.S. military field manuals be made available at the Academy's American Shelf. The Ambassador then addressed the entire cadet corps, stressing the importance of human rights and elections to healthy democracy.

HISTORIC FESTIVAL EVENT SHOWCASES U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

14. The Ambassador attended the street dance parade with Congressman Mauricio Domogan and Baguio Mayor Reinaldo Bautista. Baguio's annual Panagbenga, a street dance competition inspired by the Bendian, an Ibaloi dance of celebration that originated in the Cordillera region, is presented by dancers clad in flower-inspired costumes. The event took on special significance this year as Baguio celebrates its centennial. USAID's Sustainable Energy Development Program and Energy and Clean Air Project participated in the competition to showcase the youth's concern for energy conservation and environmental protection. In addition to supporting U.S. environmental objectives in the region, the Ambassador's involvement in the Panagbenga celebration allowed her to reinforce the historical relationship between the United States and the Baguio region.

DISCUSSION WITH POLICE CHIEFS HIGHLIGHTS SECURITY CONCERNS

15. The Ambassador met with the Benguet regional police chief and the Baguio City police chief at the Baguio residence. She raised the issue of possible election violence during the 2010 presidential elections, stressing the importance of effective investigations of extra-judicial murders. Both the regional and Baguio City police chiefs said that they are aware of problems in the region with trafficking in persons and the production of marijuana. The Ambassador praised the regional and Baguio City police for providing effective protection for U.S. businesses, U.S. Peace Corps volunteers and tourists in the area. The chiefs thanked the Ambassador for U.S. funding and support for the model police station in Baguio City.

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MEDIA OPPORTUNITIES

16. The Ambassador was able to address both national and local media at the Panagbenga festival. She emphasized the close historical relationship between the United States and Baguio City and highlighted the USAID supported environmental projects taking place in the region. During a taped regional television interview, the Ambassador spoke to the people of Baguio about her visit to the Flower Festival and the special relationship the United States has with the city. The Ambassador reached a national audience with a live radio interview at Benguet State University. She focused comments on the historical and ongoing relationship between the United States and the Benguet region.

U.S. TIES WITH BENGUET STATE UNIVERSITY STRENGTHENED

17. The Ambassador met with the university president and other school officials during her visit to Benguet State University. The university was founded in 1918 by Americans and has grown into an important regional school. During her visit, she said that the relationship between the university and the United States has continued to be strong. The Ambassador also met with a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer who teaches in the humanities department. The volunteer recently coached a team of elementary school soccer player to the regional championship. The Ambassador interacted with the children and university officials during the team's practice session.

KENNEY